

Jean Baptiste Loeillet ("John of London"): Trio in b minor

(Sonata in b minor, op. 2, No. 6)

By Jeffrey Solow

The Flemish family Loeillet included six composer/instrumentalists, two of whom were named Jean Baptiste, and a surgeon named Jean Baptiste François, thus confusing music publishers and historians ever since. In a vain attempt to keep them straight, one Jean Baptiste became known as "John Loeillet of London" and his younger cousin as "Loeillet de Gant." Nevertheless, references often intermix biographies of the two and assign dates applicable to neither.

Born in Ghent, Jean Baptiste (1680-1730) settled in London in 1705 where he anglicized his first name to John and was often referred to phonetically as "Lullie" or "Lully." In addition to composing, Loeillet was a versatile performer and a successful impresario and entrepreneur. He played flute, oboe, harpsichord, organ, probably the violin, and perhaps the viola de gamba as well (he bequeathed one to his uncle in his will). He was a member of the Drury Lane orchestra and played principal oboe as well as a flute in the Queen's Theater opera orchestra. (Dissatisfied with the limitations of the recorder, he was largely responsible for popularizing the transverse flute in London.) For four years he ran a concert series at his house in Covent Garden where, in 1714, he gave the London premier of Corelli's *Concerti Grossi*, Op. 6.

Loeillet composed two sets of "Lessons" for the harpsichord or spinet, *Six Sonatas for a Variety of Instruments*, Op. 1, *Twelve Solos (sonatas) for flute with basso continuo*, Op. 3, and *Twelve Sonatas in Three Parts*, Op. 2 which were published in 1725. Early in the twentieth century, the sixth of these sonatas, originally written in c minor for flute, oboe or violin, and basso continuo (harpsichord and cello), was adapted for modern piano trio by Alexandre Béon.

"The only constant is change." A cliché, of course, but none the less true and particularly true concerning the performance of music from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. What we now consider to be respectfully authentic the nineteenth and early twentieth century would have found unpalatably dry and what they regarded as expressive our time sees as unstylistic and self-indulgent. A redefinition can alter our evaluations, however. Instead of thinking of Bach-Stokowski as out-of-style and excessive, why not regard it as something completely new?—a collaboration across time bringing Stokowski's inspired orchestration to Bach's eighteenth century compositional genius. Just so is Alexandre Béon's 1911 harmonization and adaptation of Loeillet's 1725 sonata. With the violin taking the flute part and the cello replacing the oboe, here is an old jewel, recut, polished and placed in a new setting where it shines with even greater brilliance.

